



THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

October 24, 2006

RECEIVED

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The Honorable Hilda Solis
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Hilda L. Solis, M.C.

Dear Congresswoman Solis:

I am replying to the letter that Congressman Lane Evans shared with you in which he requested that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) establish a task force or working group to ensure compliance with Executive Order 13166, Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and to provide details of VA's process to evaluate materials for translation and distribution to VA facilities.

VA recently assessed the status of LEP implementation throughout the Department. The assessment concluded that most facilities have implemented programs to provide meaningful access to benefits and services for veterans and their families who may be limited in their English proficiency. The assessment also showed that VA is in step with the changing demographics of the nation. The predominant language spoken by veterans and their families other than English is Spanish. VA has translated more documents from English into Spanish than any other language to accommodate this need. VA continues to improve outreach through ensuring effective transition for veterans separating from the military, expanding social programs through community vet centers, and extending service to minority and female veterans.

VA's veteran population is a reflection of our nation's diversity. Instead of a centrally directed effort, I believe that the Department's local facilities are better situated to assess and evaluate the LEP needs of our veterans and their families, to include evaluating material for translation and distribution. Each of the three Administrations developed an LEP action plan to ensure their facilities fully implement all LEP requirements by the end of the calendar year.

I believe that VA's current initiatives are in the right direction to ensure the Administrations fully comply with the Executive Order. I do not believe that establishing a Department task force or working group will be more effective than the Administrations pursuing their unique objectives. I appreciate your understanding in providing VA the opportunity to see these actions through. At the end of the year we will re-evaluate the data received and report our findings to you in March 2007.

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The Honorable Hilda Solis

Thank you for your interest in the welfare of our Nation's veterans and their families. Similar letters have been sent to the other Members of Congress that are listed in Congressman Evans' incoming letter.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gordon H. Mansfield". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gordon" being more prominent and the last name "Mansfield" following in a similar style.

Gordon H. Mansfield